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Chapter 6

Dance, Visibility and Representational Self-awareness in an Emberá Community in Panama

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The community of Parara Puru in Chagres National Park, Panama, a two hour drive from Panama City, is an Emberá community with many talented and skilled dancers. The members of this community – women, men and children – dance for consecutive groups of tourists day after day. They dance traditional Emberá dances, some of which were used in the past in curing ceremonies, while others were used purely for entertainment. Due to their full-time involvement with tourism, the residents of Parara Puru have numerous opportunities to perfect their skills as individual performers and to spontaneously improvise or explore the details of dance as an expressive medium. Their daily engagement with Emberá dancing, and the enactment of dances in front of audiences of outsiders, has encouraged local dancers to develop a strong interest in the authenticity and history of their dance, the details of the choreography, and its importance as medium of representation. Overall, the practice of dancing for tourists has emerged as an act of wider significance for the Emberá, contributing not only to the global visibility of this ethnic group, but also to the knowledge and awareness of local dancers about their own culture.

This chapter embarks upon an exploration of Emberá dance, which has three aims. First, I seek to chart ethnographically the details of this tradition, which had been in decline over the later part of the twentieth century, but has – since the introduction of tourism fifteen years ago – been revitalized. Given that previous ethnographic testimonies on this topic – however valuable these may be – are short and do not provide a thorough description of the particular dances (see Torres de Araúz 1966: 131–35; Reverte Coma 2002: 273–82), I attempt here to fill a gap in the anthropological record.[1] Thus, taking inspiration from the developing field of the anthropology of dance (Spencer 1985; Reed 1998; Royce 2000; Wulff 2001;

Grau 2007), I describe the particular form and practice of Emberá dance as enacted in the context of indigenous tourism, but also the circumstances by which Emberá dance contributes to the wider politics of Emberá cultural representation.

The issue of visibility understood in terms of cultural representation at the national and international level is my second concern in this chapter. With the introduction of tourism, the renewed interest of the Emberá in their dancing tradition is paralleled by an increased visibility of Emberá culture more widely. It is in this respect, I argue, that Emberá dancing makes a contribution to Emberá cultural representation more generally. Dance provides a communicative medium that is immediate, non-verbal and easily transmissible to heterogeneous audiences (Daniel 1996). Through presentations that involve music and dancing, Emberá individuals dressed in traditional attire have succeeded in captivating the imagination of Western audiences. Undoubtedly their success involves turning pre-existing stereotypes about indigenous rainforest dwellers to their advantage; and in this regard, the Emberá, like other indigenous groups in the Americas, engage with the exoticized images projected by the global community (Turner 1992, 2006; Conklin 1997, 2007; Ramos 1998; Ewart 2007; Bunten 2008). Indeed, asserting such stereotypes can have positive political implications, explains Guerrón-Montero (2006b: 658), writing about the music of the Afro-Antillean community of Panama; and in the case of the Emberá, as with indigenous groups in the Amazon (e.g., Conklin 2007), exotic stereotypes can be an asset to cultural visibility.

My third aim is related to the second and concerns the notion of authenticity, and the proliferation of what Gow (2007: 54–55) describes as a Western aesthetic about the appearance and life of Amerindian inhabitants of the rainforest; an aesthetic that expects indigenous communities to be uncontaminated by Western civilizational elements (Ramos 1998; Ewart 2007). According to this Western aesthetic, Emberá dancing performances can be accused of inauthenticity, a perspective prevalent in the expectations of some tourists who visit Parara Puru.[2] An extensive body of anthropological literature, however, has confronted the essentialist foundations of the authenticity/inauthenticity divide, especially as this becomes apparent in the tourist context (Smith 1989; Selwyn 1996; Abram, Waldron and MacLeod 1997; Coleman and Crang 2002; Bruner 2005; Franklin 2003; Leite and Graburn 2009; Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011). The concept of inauthenticity entails the potential of denigrating certain cultural performances in comparison to other imagined or actual performances or simply in juxtaposition with one's expectations. From an analytical point of view, it makes more sense to move beyond the divide of authenticity/inauthenticity – unless such a problematic is directly introduced by the social groups under study – and approach cultural presentations for tourists as dynamic cultural processes that may involve experimenting with new possibilities beyond or in addition to Western expectations (Bruner 1993, 2005; Skinner and Theodossopoulos 2011).

Thus, I will consciously refrain from referring to Emberá dance performances for tourists as 'staged', 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' and I will employ instead a more useful conceptual distinction used by Nahachewsky (1995) to discuss dance

specifically: that between participatory and presentational dance. The former takes place at social events, such as community celebrations, while the latter relates to dance performances that involve some cultural distance between performers and audience. As Nahachewsky herself demonstrates, these 'two conceptual categories are idealisations', and in fact 'specific dance traditions may operate within any range on this conceptual axis' (Nahachewsky 1995: 1). This is the case of the Emberá dance tradition, which is enacted in both participatory and presentational contexts, and represents a single dance genre to be followed in both tourist and non-tourist occasions. In this respect Emberá dance can be contrasted with other examples of dancing for tourists, such as the case of Bali described by Picard, where separate categories of dance have been set – albeit with a certain degree of confusion – to distinguish between which dances are suitable for the entertainment of tourists and which are not (Picard 1996: 155–63).

Having made the above clarifications, I will now proceed with a description of the Emberá dancing tradition as I have witnessed it in Parara Puru, my primary fieldwork site, a community that specializes in indigenous tourism. I use ethnographic material collected during six periods of fieldwork in Panama, carried out between 2005 and 2011 and totalling seventeenth months, during which I have also visited several other Emberá communities, which, unlike Parara Puru, do not receive tourists on a frequent basis. My experiences among these communities have provided me with a wider perspective on the effects of tourism on the wider politics of Emberá representation (see Theodossopoulos 2007, 2010), which informs my discussion in this chapter. In the section that follows, I draw a sketch of the community of Parara Puru and its involvement with tourism. Then, I continue with a description of the various types of dance performed in cultural presentations for tourists, and I give a representative example of such a presentation. I conclude by underlining the importance and contribution of dance performances for tourists to Emberá cultural representation, but also to the self-awareness of local dancers about their own culture. 'Dance and movement are not only shaped by society', argues Helena Wulff, 'dance and movement also shape society' (Wulff 2001: 3212).

The Community and Its Involvement with Tourism

The Emberá, until thirty or forty years ago, preferred to live in dispersed settlements (see Faron 1962; Herlihy 1986; Kane 1994). They built their thatched-roof houses on stilts, preferably close to a river, and used the rivers as transport avenues to travel, transfer their horticultural produce, and migrate.[3] When faced with trouble – for example, external threat, internal disagreement or lack of resources – they would disassemble the wooden components of their houses and move to a new location in the rainforest. This is how their ancestors dealt with European penetration in the colonial past (Williams 2005) and the assimilation policies of the Latin American nation-states that later emerged. Following this steady and gradual pattern of migration – usually from one river sector to the next – the Emberá, and a culturally related ethic group, the Wounaan, have expanded from Choco in Colombia to south-eastern Panama, and more specifically to the relatively inaccessible region

of Darien (see Wassén 1935; Faron 1962; Kane 1994; Tayler 1996; Velásquez Runk 2009; Colin 2010). In the last fifty years groups of Emberá have established themselves in locations closer to Panama City and the Panama Canal, such as the wider area surrounding the River Chagres.

In Chagres, the Emberá were initially settled in their preferred dispersed manner. At first they relied on horticulture and hunting, but later, in 1985, the creation of a national park in the area prohibited systematic cultivation and hunting. To survive under these restrictions, the Emberá living in the park explored the option of cultural tourism. Gradually, and with some external help,[4] the Emberá learned how to share the profits generated from tourism, keep their accounts, meet the necessary safety regulations, and make links with tourism agencies interested in organizing tourist excursions. The agencies provided the infrastructure for advertising and transporting the tourists, while the Emberá offered the knowledge of the rainforest and the 'tourist spectacle' (see Urry 1990). The entertainment offered to the tourists focused on visual and easily communicable aspects of Emberá cultural tradition, such as for example dance, that could be conveyed to outsiders during short visits.

The success of the experimental introduction of cultural tourism encouraged the Emberá in Chagres to form concentrated settlements, villages that specialize in the development of tourism and are prepared to carry out cultural presentations for outsiders on a frequent, almost daily basis. The social and political nucleus of the new communities was composed primarily of Emberá individuals who had been born in Chagres, although some marriage partners came from distant communities in Darien. The new communities were all set up close to a river (according to Emberá tradition), and all constructed in a careful manner so that they adhered to the rules and stylistic conventions of Emberá architecture.

It is also important to note that the flexible manner with which the communities were composed and organized, and the overall decision to establish concentrated settlements, is part of a much more widespread process. Since the late 1950s, the Emberá and the Wounaan living in Panamanian territory started resettling in concentrated communities (Herlihy 1986, 2003; Kane 1994; Velásquez Runk 2009; Colin 2010). The government provided schools and medical care, and in some regions a certain degree of regional autonomy,[5] while the members of the new communities elected leaders to represent them politically. Although Parara Puru, the community I examine in this chapter, was founded only fourteen years ago, its foundation was part of a wider process of resettlement in concentrated communities that started fifty years earlier in Darien.

Since its foundation the community has come to receive tourists on an almost daily basis during the high season and approximately two to three times a week during the low season.[6] The tourists arrive in small or large groups[7] at designated embarkation points at Lake Alajuela – at the edge of Chagres National Park – and continue their journey to the community by motorized canoe navigated by the Emberá. The great majority of the tourists come from either exclusive resorts situated in the wider Canal area or cruise ships that are passing through the Canal. Each visitor contributes to the community a standard fee, which is determined

by the size of the group.[8] The residents of Parara Puru share this income with each other according to an organized formula that takes into account how many members of each family participate in work invested in tourism and the nature of their contribution. The overwhelming majority of local residents work full-time in tourism and directly communicate their satisfaction with this type of work, which they find more rewarding than cultivating the land or labouring for wages outside the community.

Seen from this wider perspective, the development of cultural tourism in Chagres emerged as a new economic strategy that the Emberá successfully explored, without radically departing from more generally established patterns of migration, residence and social organization. As I have argued elsewhere, the Emberá who now engage with tourism adhere to the basic principles of post-concentrated-community organization, while they experiment with new economic opportunities (Theodossopoulos 2010). In this respect, their engagement with tourism can be seen as a new adaptation strategy, but one that encourages the Emberá to work more closely with and develop a strong interest in their own indigenous traditions. Among the latter, dancing in particular has emerged as a daily practice in the Emberá communities that have developed cultural tourism.

A representative selection of Emberá dances is always included as a standard constituent of the cultural presentations carried out for the tourists and, in this manner, dance performances have become an integral part of the 'cultural package' advertised and made available. In fact, it is fair to say that the dance performance is the culmination of the cultural presentations, the part that the tourists most enthusiastically photograph and video, and the one in which they are invited to participate most actively. Dance, as Daniel has argued, has the advantage of being 'a holistic and multisensory phenomenon that often communicates to tourists and performers at a fundamental level' (Daniel 1996: 781–82). Apart from the dances, the standard cultural package for visiting tourists involves a short speech on the history of the community and the methods of Emberá artefact construction, a traditional meal of fish and fried plantains, body-painting with the black juice of the *jagua* fruit, and a canoe ride to the nearby waterfalls.

In most cases the dancing is introduced towards the end of the above activities and requires the cooperation of a larger group of Emberá performers. The dances are performed in special spaces designed for cultural displays, surrounded by rows of wooden benches for the audience. Parara Puru has two such specially designated dance areas, two enormous thatched roofed houses (without walls), which the local residents refer to as communal houses.[9] Unlike all other houses in the community, the communal houses in Parara Puru are not built on stilts and the dances are executed on the earth floor. The most recent and smaller communal house accommodates the overflow of parallel tourist groups during the peak of the tourist season. The older and larger communal house – apart from the benches surrounding the dance area – shelters wooden tables with traditional Emberá artefacts (*artesania*), such as hand-woven baskets, masks and wood sculptures, which are made available for display and purchase. The dance performances, therefore, take place in a setting surrounded

by Emberá material culture, the *artesania*, inside the communal houses themselves, which comprise representative examples of Emberá architecture.

The Animal Dances

There are two categories of dance that the inhabitants of Parara Puru recognize as part of the Emberá tradition: dances which usually carry the name of an animal (or less frequently a plant or an object), and couple dances such as the rumba Emberá and cumbia Emberá. The animal dances are danced by a line of women, or young girls, who imitate the movements and characteristics of the animal (or plant) in question. These dances were part of healing ceremonies in the past, and were danced by young girls under the guidance of a shaman (*Jaibaná*). During those ceremonies the *Jaibaná* would choose which animal dance to perform, inviting the animal spirit to either expel the 'bad' spirit that afflicted the patient or seduce it to willingly depart. The same dances were also performed on other occasions that called for the protection of spirits, such as the inauguration of a new canoe, a new house or an important gathering, and during ceremonies that focused on communication with the spirit world (Torres de Araúz 1966; Tayler 1996; Reverte Coma 2002; Ulloa 1992). The Emberá argue that this practice has not been completely discontinued, although nowadays there are only a handful of practicing *Jaibanás* left in Panama.

Since the establishment of concentrated settlements in Darien, the animal dances have been performed in festivals commemorating the foundation of a new community. In some of those festivals, groups of women from neighbouring communities will compete with which other, each group performing one or two animal dances of their choice. Occasions like these provided the women in Darien with an incentive to continue practising the dances during a period when traditional dancing had been in decline. Before a competition the women will rehearse the dance, perfect their skill, and add new elements to the dance – such as new movement patterns in imitation of the particular animal in question – but without altering completely the general structure of the choreography, which is transmitted from one generation of women to another.

Stephanie Kane, an anthropologist who worked in Darien during the 1980s, reports that animal dances were performed during formal occasions, 'political congresses and international events of cultural exchange sponsored by the government', such as when Emberá communities were entertaining government and military officials during the regime of Manuel Noriega (Kane 1994: 167). José Manuel Reverte Coma (2002), who published a detailed ethnographic account of Emberá culture based on fieldwork in Darien during the 1950s and 1960s, mentions that the *Jaibanás* in Darien would not hesitate to ask young girls from their community to dance for a non-Emberá visitor, such as the anthropologist himself. These examples demonstrate that the animal dances in the past, as in the present, were an aspect of Emberá culture that the Emberá saw as appropriate for performing in order to honour outsiders, such as government officials, foreign visitors, and, nowadays, tourists.[10]

Nowadays, the Emberá animal dances are an indispensable constituent of cultural performances for tourists. They are enacted by groups of women that move in single file and in a synchronized manner, with energetic jumps and dramatic movements that imitate the familiar imagery of particular natural species. Very often, the women hold the dancer in front of them by their skirt (*paruma*), forming – as Krieger describes commenting on a rare photograph from the early part of the twentieth century – 'an unbroken encircling chain' (Krieger 1926: 128, plate 34). During the dance, however, this 'unbroken chain' may be temporarily divided up or become a closed circle, always depending on the choreographic arrangement.

In preparation for the dance the women form a line led by the dance leader who holds a small drum, the *tonóa*. This instrument provides the basic rhythm, and in the absence of musicians accompanying the performance, a small group of girls can practise the dance by simply relying on the rhythm set by the leading performer. When men support the dance performance with musical accompaniment, they play the *chirú*, a small 10 to 12 cm flute, in a manner that reinforces the rhythm established by the *tonóa*. While dancing, the main line of dancers can form circles or snake-like wavy patterns. Sometimes it is divided into two lines only to reunite later in the same dance. The leading dancer can occupy various positions according to the choreographic demands of the particular animal-imitation theme. For example, in the flower dance (*ártoto karí*) – one of the dances not named after an animal – the dance leader might act as the stamen of the flower, encircled by her fellow dancers who represent the petals; in the dance of the snake (*damá karí*) the dance leader traces a wavy line, leading the other women to follow her, one behind the other mimicking the movement of a snake.

Many animal dances are accompanied by songs, which are chanted by the women while dancing. The lyrics of these songs emphasize or praise some of the most visible qualities of the species after which the dances are named. In some cases, the same animal dance has two versions, each with a different song, or one with a song and one without. It is technically impossible to compile an exhaustive list of all animal dances, since each community practises an extensive but not exactly identical variety of dances, and because new dances are introduced with the passage of time. Flexibility and a certain degree of improvisation lies at the heart of this type of dancing, which relies on the imitation of a particular species that has captured the imagination of the performers or has, in the past, been recommended for its power by a shaman. Theoretically every natural species – animal or plant, and in some cases also significant objects, such as the cross or the canoe – can provide the inspiration for one of these dances. They will then acquire the name of this species (or object) and the suffix *-karí*, meaning 'dance' in Emberá.

Rumba and Cumbia Emberá

The animal dances are not the only 'traditional' Emberá dances recognized in Parara Puru. Rumba and cumbia Emberá, despite their evidently non-indigenous names, are considered by the Emberá to be an indispensable part of their musical tradition. Throughout living memory they have been danced by the Emberá during

community celebrations and festive occasions. 'The Emberá had been dancing rumba and cumbia since ancient times', I was told emphatically by several respondents, 'our grandparents danced them and the parents of their grandparents'. The residents of Parara Puru also juxtapose rumba and cumbia Emberá (which are considered as 'traditionally' Emberá) with *típico*, a popular musical genre in Panama, which some of the members of the community find attractive and dance during more personal occasions (such as an adolescent's birthday) or festivals outside the indigenous community (for example, in the neighbouring Latino towns). Emberá music, I was told in Parara Puru, is unlike the music of the Latino peasants (*los campesinos*), because it is not performed with the accordion and the guitar, instruments considered by many Emberá as emblematic of *campesino* music,[11] and also because it is distinctive in melody and style.

Previous anthropologists, such as Reina Torres de Araúz (1966) and Reverte Coma (2002), both of whom conducted fieldwork in Darien in the 1960s, identify Western and African influences in the music of the Emberá. Both scholars describe how the Emberá enjoyed listening to music in general, including Latino music that they heard during occasional visits to small provincial towns or villages in Darien. When the Emberá visited those communities, usually to sell their plantain produce, they spent considerable time in the cantinas of the Afrodarienitas – the black inhabitants of Darien – listening carefully to various types of non-Emberá music from jukeboxes and the radio (Torres de Araúz 1966: 131–35; Reverte Coma 2002: 273). Furthermore, the two ethnographers report, some Emberá men in Darien owned and played their own accordions and guitars (Torres de Araúz 1966: 135; Reverte Coma 2002: 279), instruments that my respondents in Parara Puru strongly associate with non-Emberá music.

The difficulty with tracing the exact details of the history and origins of rumba and cumbia Emberá is a general characteristic of research of this type (cf. Wade 2000: 231). Wade, in his work on Colombian music, further observes general tendencies to project styles into the past, the many local variations in musical styles, the movement of music across the country–city divide, and the combinations of African, indigenous and European elements (Wade 2000). It is safe to speculate, considering the strong musical interests of the Emberá described by Torres de Araúz (1966), Tayler (1996) and Reverte Coma (2002), that at various points in the past the ancestors of the Emberá were exposed to diverse exogenous musical influences – including music from other neighbouring indigenous groups, or even church chanting introduced by missionaries in previous centuries (Bermúdez 1994: 232). Cumbia, a major Colombian musical genre (Wade 2000), has influenced Panamanian music,[12] including related Panamanian rhythms such as cumbia-*chorrerana* and *típico*. I should also stress that 'rumba' in Panama does not refer to the particular Cuban style (see Daniel 1995) or the rumba danced in international dance competitions; it is rather a generic term referring to all types of loud party music, ideally of a cheerful and rattling type, such as the music that the grandparents of the contemporary Emberá encountered in their short visits to Colombian and Panamanian Latino towns.

Thus, it is fair to say that rumba and cumbia Emberá are the end product of a long process of cultural mixture or 'transculturation' (Chasteen 2004). This process has resulted in a new and unique musical style, which, as with most other living music traditions, is subject to change, variation and improvisation. The confidence of the Emberá in the old or ancient quality of their music indicates that any external musical influences were introduced to the Emberá gradually, and over a long period of time, allowing ample opportunities for consolidating new elements within established indigenous – that is, Amerindian – musical themes and traditions. What is also important to stress in the context of this analysis is that in Parara Puru and in other communities that entertain tourists, rumba and cumbia Emberá have been introduced to the presentations for tourists as representative examples of Emberá dancing and Emberá culture.

In terms of the order of presentation during presentations for tourists, rumba and cumbia Emberá always follow the animal dances, and provide a joyful, party-like conclusion to the cultural presentations. Since they are danced in couples – man and woman – they provide the Emberá with an opportunity to invite tourists of the opposite sex to participate, through the medium of the dance, in Emberá cultural tradition. In Parara Puru, the two dances, cumbia and rumba, follow different choreographic arrangements: the cumbia is danced in a procession of pairs, each couple holding hands and following one another in a line, while the rumba is danced by pairs, once again holding hands but moving more freely around in a circle. In this last respect, rumba Emberá with its less orderly arrangement pays tribute to its name, that is 'rumba' in the Panamanian sense, a loud party-like music.

The two dances are accompanied by music played by Emberá men. A well-organized group of musicians – such as the ones formed in Chagres – can have a flute (*chirú-dromá*) which is the lead musical instrument, a large drum (*el tambor grande* or *caja* or *chim-bom-bom*), a smaller drum beaten with sticks (*la requinta*), and some (or all) of the following percussion instruments: *churuca* (*chogoró*), *maracas* and turtle drums (*chimpigí*). The flute player introduces the main musical theme, and also engages in virtuoso improvisation, often repeating the refrain several times. In Parara Puru the music is not usually accompanied by lyrics, but in other Emberá communities some men sing while performing rumba Emberá.

Dancing with Tourists in Parara Puru

The two main categories of dance that I have described so far have become indispensable parts of Emberá dance performances for tourists. This is not only the case in Parara Puru and in the general Chagres area, but also in communities that do not receive regular visits from tourists (see Theodossopoulos 2007). This standardization, my respondents in Parara Puru explained, is related to the desire of the Emberá to present a representative selection of their dancing tradition. This should ideally include one or two animal dances, a cumbia Emberá and a rumba Emberá, although often the Emberá choose to present two rumbas (and no cumbia); 'the rumba', they say, 'is easier for the tourists to dance'. The relative standardization of the structure of performances is also related to comparisons with different Emberá

communities and the attempt of the Emberá to follow what has so far proved a successful formula of entertainment: 'when we do something successfully', one of the leaders of Parara Puru explained, 'they [other Emberá communities] want to do it as well'.

As I mentioned previously, during the last dance, which is usually a rumba, the Emberá dancers ask their visitors to join in. Most tourists are pleasantly surprised by the invitation, and many accept. Those who do not dance enjoy the performance or take photographs of their friends or family dancing with the Emberá. How many tourists join in depends on the size of the tourist group. Tourists visiting Parara Puru in smaller groups have more opportunities to participate in the dance, as there are proportionally more indigenous dancers to partner them. However, even those tourists who do not dance share the cheerful atmosphere generated by the music, the dance and the dancing of the other tourists in their group.

A typical dance performance for tourists in Parara Puru is introduced as a dimension of Emberá culture. The women form a line, waiting for the first to beat her *tonóa* (the small drum), the signal for the start of the dance. Then they execute two animal dances, imitating with their movements or with the arrangement of their bodies the movements of particular animals. In the hummingbird dance (*impisú karí*), for example, the single line of dancers forms a circle, a formation that represents a flower. The leading dancer then enters the circle, imitating a hummingbird drinking nectar. The dancers sing a short verse about the hummingbird, moving their arms up and down in imitation of the bird's wings and in time to the rhythm of the *tonóa*. At the end of the short song, the circle is dissolved and then forms again on the other side of the communal house, closer to another part of the audience. After a thirty-second break to catch their breath, the women execute a second animal dance, followed by the warm applause of the tourists.

The Emberá take the stage once more, in pairs of men and women holding hands, in procession. The pairs form a circle, moving to the rhythm of the cumbia Emberá. At the end of the cumbia performance, individual dancers walk towards the audience stretching their hands out to invite the tourists to join them in rumba Emberá. Emberá children – usually little girls – reproduce the same gesture employed by the adults, successfully encouraging tourists (of the same or opposite sex) to join them in the dance. The adult Emberá more conventionally invite a single partner of the opposite sex. The musicians play rumba Emberá and the Emberá couples, as well as the mixed tourist–Emberá couples, fill the dance stage in an upbeat mood.

Very often the end of the dancing coincides with the departure time for the visitors, especially for tourists from cruise ships, who are always on a tight schedule. Other groups might stay in the community a bit longer browsing the selection of artefacts. By the end of the last dance performance the local dancers are physically exhausted, as they often have to dance several times for different groups, especially during the high season. All dancers contribute to the overall tourism endeavour from more than one position of responsibility. For example, some of the men who either play the music or dance the cumbia and the rumba had previously devoted considerable effort navigating the canoes that bring the tourists to the community.

After the dance they have to navigate the canoes on the return journey. The women dancers make general preparations earlier in the day, such as cooking the food – fried fish and fried plantain chips – that the tourists consume, or cleaning the surroundings before their arrival. Very early in the morning, before they join their efforts in collective activities, they deal with routine domestic activities, while additional chores are waiting for them in the late afternoon after the departure of the tourists.

Considering these detailed aspects of daily labour in Parara Puru, it is not surprising that dance performances require careful organization and planning. This is the case for most jobs that relate to the hosting of tourists, and also most other communal undertakings. The Emberá in Parara Puru share a strong communal ethos of sharing jobs and responsibilities, and they often do so based on a work plan that involves the rotation of tasks. Dancing for tourists requires prior organization of this sort, as the leaders of the community have to take care that a sufficient number of dancers and musicians are available for each particular performance. This task is made somewhat easier by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the local inhabitants, men and women, children and senior individuals, are able to dance and – unless already exhausted by other jobs – welcome an opportunity to do so. As the Emberá themselves put it, dancing for tourists is enjoyable; indeed, it is more enjoyable than other responsibilities related to the hosting of tourists, and much more than wage labour outside the community. 'When we work for tourism', the Emberá explain, 'we work with our culture'.

Visibility and Representational Self-awareness

I have already described how dance has become a central part of cultural presentations for tourists in the community of Parara Puru. The dancing, more than any other cultural practice that is made available in the particular presentations, is an expressive medium that captures the imagination of the visiting audiences, and has been so far very successful in enhancing the visibility of Emberá culture more generally. Photographs of Emberá women and men performing are frequently displayed on the publicity generated by national tourists campaigns and tourism agencies. Images of Emberá dancers are often supported by some description explaining Emberá culture, or at least refer to the Emberá by their politically correct self-designation – that is, 'Emberá' – as opposed to the stereotyped descriptive *Chocoes* (the people from Choco, in Colombia), which refers to the place of origin of their ancestors, but has been used in Panama to discriminate against the Emberá and the Wounaan as people who are not properly Panamanian.

This wider visibility of Emberá culture is, however, a very recent phenomenon, realized in the last ten or fifteen years. During colonial times, but also later, after the establishment of the Latin American nations, the Emberá struggled to avoid social assimilation, maintain their language and their distinctive way of life (Williams 2005). Stereotyped as *indios* (Indians) they occupied, along with other Amerindian groups, one of the lowest positions in the Panamanian social hierarchy. The introduction of tourism has changed this history of discrimination significantly

(Theodossopoulos 2010, 2011). It was first the Panamanian government, via the Panamanian Institute of Tourism (IPAT), which encouraged cultural tourism and created a plan for its development (see Guerrón-Montero 2006a, 2006b). Images of the Emberá and of their better-known neighbours, the Kuna (on whom, see Salvador 1976; Swain 1989; Tice 1995), were included in national advertising campaigns for tourism. Now that indigenous tourism has taken off, the tourists themselves are disseminating information about Emberá culture.

Some tourists, after their return home, feel a strong desire to share the experience they had while visiting some remarkable people in the Panamanian rainforest, the Emberá. They publish their photos and short videos on the internet, along with descriptions of what they learned from the Emberá and their overall experiences. In the last five years, the rate of this wider dissemination on the internet has increased exponentially. It is paralleled by the creation of new webpages advertising trips to particular Emberá communities, or explaining facets of Emberá culture. This increasing publicity has contributed in enhancing the overall profile of the Emberá nationally, presenting them as people who contribute actively to the economy of Panama and are respected by tourists from economically powerful nations. Internationally, they have gained recognition as an indigenous group with a culture increasingly known worldwide.

Although very few Emberá have access to the internet, the admiration of the international public is communicated to the Emberá by the tourists themselves, most of whom do not hide their enthusiastic reception of Emberá culture during their visits to particular communities. The strong interest of the tourists for things indigenous is expressed in the questions they ask (see Theodossopoulos 2011), their participation in the dancing, their gestures of thanks and their overall gratitude, which is not only conveyed verbally but also by small monetary donations. On a few occasions, Westerners who had been captivated by Emberá culture during their short day trips made more significant donations to the community, such as laptop computers, digital cameras and a new, 'modern' toilet for visiting tourists.

From the point of view of the Emberá, the positive attention of the outside world is a new phenomenon. The adult residents of Parara Puru, for example, were raised with the expectation – originating from the wider Panamanian society – that they should learn Spanish, dress in modern clothes and adopt Western practices. In the context of previous discrimination and stereotyping in Panama, Emberá culture was caricatured as 'primitive' or 'uncivilized'. With the introduction of tourism, however, the Emberá are receiving the message that their culture is now respected by the international community, and by individual tourists or travellers who come from countries more powerful and wealthier than Panama. This realization is now encouraging the Emberá to forge a stronger identification with their indigenous identity, and project their indigenous identity to outsiders more confidently. Instead of hiding away from the non-Emberá world, an adaptation strategy that served them well in the past (Williams 2005), they are now reaching out to the international community, and gradually take advantage of the new representational opportunities offered by an increasingly globalized world (Theodossopoulos 2009).

With greater visibility, however, comes greater responsibility: the inhabitants of Parara Puru now desire to become even better hosts to their visitors. Not only do they wish to perform, but also to guide their visitors in their cultural practices. Central to this desire is the realization of the Emberá that a successful engagement with indigenous tourism involves a certain degree of control of the tourism exchange by the indigenous community. As some of them clearly explain, they prefer to receive the tourists in their community, instead of dancing for them in hotels or on cruise ships. It is also important, they add, to provide their guests with an explanation of Emberá culture, instead of merely dancing or selling arefacts. 'Tourism', one of the leaders of Parara Puru explained, 'is an opportunity to tell foreigners about Emberá culture', to make Emberá traditions more widely known. So, with respect to their dance tradition, the Emberá of Parara Puru do not only aspire to improve their performative skill but also to learn additional details about the dances and their histories. Gradually, their engagement with their dances has contributed to an increasing awareness of what the local dancers themselves see as constituting an Emberá identity.

Against this background, the relative lack of abundant information about the dance practices of the past motivates the dancers to explore less frequently practised aspects of their own tradition. For example, the women in Parara Puru regularly introduce new animal dances into the dance repertoire of their community by bringing together memories of dances they remember from their childhood. Those women who have married into the community introduce new variations or animal dances with different names, drawing on their own memories and experiences of these dances in the communities of their parents. All residents of Parara Puru – the women who are interested in animal dance variations, but also the men who are interested in rumba and cumbia musical themes – have become increasingly interested in the performances of other communities, and in the overall history of their dance and music tradition.

This renewed interest in the history of their dances, and in Emberá traditions more generally, has enhanced the representational awareness of the inhabitants of Parara Puru. It is in this respect that the manner of presentation, but also the explanation of the presentation, become acts of ever increasing consequence. In Parara Puru, as its residents explain, dances are performed not merely for the enjoyment of the tourists but also for the sake of their own 'education'. Thus, the animal dances, and rumba and cumbia Emberá, are enacted as representative examples of an indigenous culture that has survived – despite the discrimination experienced in the past – and now claims its rightful place in the contemporary world. As such, the revival of Emberá dance in the present can be seen as emblematic of the resilience of Emberá culture itself.

Conclusion

The introduction of tourism into Emberá communities such as Parara Puru has brought about an intensification of Emberá cultural practices, which are now watched and admired by audiences of international tourists. Emberá dance is one

of the most visible of these cultural practices and provides an easily communicated medium for representing Emberá culture to the outside world. In this respect, the dance adds to the visibility of Emberá culture, and through this visibility it provides the Emberá with new opportunities to represent themselves. As I have argued elsewhere (Theodossopoulos 2009), marginalized communities around the globe are taking advantage of globalization in order to reach out to the world, represent their culture, and make new allies among international audiences (cf. Conklin and Graham 1995; Conklin 1997; Turner 2002; Strathern and Stewart 2009). These potential allies include tourists from the economically privileged nation-states of the North who bring with them currency and, often, a strong appreciation of indigenous cultural practices.

In many cases, the warm reception of Emberá culture by their international tourist audience is the by-product of an essentializing gaze, which is based on previous Western preconceptions about the exotic. These revolve around static images of 'an unspoiled and irrecoverable past' (Herzfeld 1997: 109), an unreflexive expectation to meet people untouched by modernity, expressed through 'the lament for things lost' (Howe 2009: 249). Rosaldo (1989) refers to this sentiment – or sentimental pessimism (Sahlins 2000) – as 'imperialist nostalgia': the children of modernity mourn what was lost by the dominating impact of their own societies. So they search among indigenous people, such as the Emberá, to discover and satisfy their Western aesthetic of premodern authenticity (Conklin 1997; Ramos 1998; Ewart 2007; Gow 2007; Santos Granero 2009). The Emberá, their appearance and their dances happen to coincide with this particular Western expectation (see also, Theodossopoulos 2012).

So, undoubtedly the tourism exchange has had an effect on Emberá culture and Emberá dance, but one that has been, so far, constructive rather than destructive. Tourist imaginaries, 'reembedded in new contexts' and built 'on local referents' – such as the exotic appearance of the Emberá and their dances – 'help in (re)creating peoples and places' (Salazar 2010: 15). The Emberá in the communities that receive tourists have seized the opportunity for improving their financial situation, but also for making their culture more widely known. From their perspective, the positive attention of their international audience positively contrasts with the stereotyping that they experienced in the past, especially in the context of relating to the wider society of their own nation. Images of Emberá dancers are now part of official national tourism campaigns, while photographs and short videos of their performances are posted on the internet by the tourists themselves. This unprecedented – by Emberá standards – publicity entails a small but positive transformation of status, nationally and internationally.

At a local level, the new visibility of Emberá culture has encouraged the local dancers to engage with their indigenous tradition and its representation in a more systematic manner. Some of them feel responsible for perfecting their skill in performing traditional dances; others express a strong interest in learning more about the history of those practices, and constantly introduce new versions and variations of dances into their repertoire. I argue that this renewed interest of the Emberá in

the details of their own culture represents a new, emerging representational self-awareness; it encourages the accumulation of new knowledge about their culture and, more importantly, a more confident articulation of this knowledge during communication with outsiders. Bunten (2008: 381) has referred to this type of self-representation as self-commodification, the construction of a marketable identity to employ in the tourism encounter, but one that does not seem alienating to the indigenous host. Thus, by becoming guides to their own culture, the Emberá in Parara Puru educate others about themselves and, more importantly, they do so in a way that they have chosen by themselves.[13] Dance is an influential representational medium in this emancipatory process.

To appreciate fully the representational self-awareness of the Emberá, we would benefit from a less static and more flexible conceptualization of authenticity (see Selwyn 1996; Abram, Waldren and Macleod 1997; Coleman and Crang 2002; Franklin 2003; Lindholm 2008; Theodossopoulos 2012). With reference to indigenous tourism in particular, Bruner (2005) has underlined the importance of seeing host indigenous communities for what they are: authentic indigenous performers. Seen from this perspective, the Emberá are authentic and true to themselves when they perform Emberá dances since they are (and remain) Emberá for the duration of their performance. Likewise, any cultural improvisations that may occur during the dances represent new possibilities for an authentic Emberá culture, which, in the same way as all cultures, is subject to change. In the case of expressive mediums such as dance, authenticity is even harder to circumscribe and narrowly define: 'movement is a primary not secondary social "text" – complex, polysemous, always already meaningful, yet continuously changing' (Desmond 1993: 36). While certain choreographic patterns may disappear over time, the possibilities for new variations are immense. This element of originality, embedded in the nature of dance, can complicate or challenge our view of staged dance performances as artificial reconstructions (Ness 1997: 81).

This is why dance in tourist settings does not always involve a loss of authenticity; on the contrary, it may reaffirm artistic freedom and encourage 'a contemporary manifestation of inventiveness within traditions and among styles' (Daniel 1996: 781–82). Indigenous dances, with their variations and improvised styles, can be seen as creative practices, that promote reflexivity and embody 'indigenous cultural meaning and values" (Citro 2010: 365, 381). Inventiveness and improvisation in this context can lead to new or alternative types of dance authenticity: the Emberá performances of animal dances, rumba and cumbia Emberá encourage a certain degree of performative improvisation, and are developing, through continuous everyday practice, to become fluid but dynamic manifestations of contemporary Emberá culture. They are – to refer to Nahachewsky's (1995) useful conceptual distinction – participatory as much as they are presentational: the former dimension provides a large repository of opportunities for improvisation, while the latter presents novel possibilities for enhancing Emberá cultural representation. More importantly, in the case of Emberá, the presentational aspect of dance enhances participatory involvement, but also an awareness of the cultural significance of dance.

In Parara Puru, during quiet intervals between consecutive visits of tourists or on days without tourists, it is relatively common to see six- to twelve-year-old girls dancing the animal dances. They approach this practice as a game and enjoy imitating the moves and choreographic variations performed by their mothers during presentations for tourists. Their elder sisters, who are more experienced dancers, might step in and dance with them, remind them of a verse in the lyrics of a song or demonstrate a particular move or pattern of a dance. In moments like these, Emberá dance is not performed or rehearsed for tourism; it is a game, a familiar set of embodied experiences, a part of these children's childhood and identification with Emberá culture and identity. At the end of the first decade of the new millennium Emberá dance is embedded in everyday life in Parara Puru and the other Emberá communities that have developed indigenous tourism. This is good news for those Western romantics who perceive with idealized admiration the resilience of indigenous practices, but also for the Emberá themselves, who seize the opportunities of the global tourist industry to experiment with and enhance their self-presentation.

Notes

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1. In comparison to the scarce ethnographic description of Emberá dance, the literature on the dance practices of the Kuna, the neighbours of the Emberá, is more developed; see in particular the work of Sandra Smith (1984, 1997), but also (Holloman 1969, Margiotti 2009).
2. For more details about tourist expectations in Parara Puru, see Theodossopoulos (2011). Suffice to say, not all tourists suspect Emberá performances of lacking authenticity. Some acknowledge the nuanced interface of tradition and modernity, while (ethnic majority) Panamanian tourists are sometimes happy to realize that Emberá share with them common tastes and experiences as citizens of the same nation.
3. Rivers are used as points of reference for defining where one (or one's family) comes from (see Faron 1962: 19), or for mapping social relationships more generally (see Isacsson 1993: 15–23; Velásquez Runk 2009: 459).
4. Initial help came from the Panamanian Institute of Tourism (IPAT), NGOs based in Panama City, and some tourist agencies.
5. For example, the two semi-autonomous reservations in Darién, Comarcas Emberá-Wounaan I & II.
6. The high period of tourist activity in Parara Puru lasts from late December to late March, which coincides with the Panamanian summer or dry season. After the middle part of April, the number of visitors gradually declines and remains low until October. Tourist numbers steadily increase from November.

7. Group size ranges from four or five to eighty or ninety visitors, with groups of over a hundred being rare. There are also occasional independent travellers, very often a couple of individuals, or sometimes, Panamanian visitors who visit with their families.
8. Smaller groups of tourists pay a higher entrance fee per person to justify the mobilization of the local community on their behalf.
9. Although constructed for the purpose of accommodating tourism, the communal houses have become focal points of the community in which community meetings take place during times outside the timetable of tourism activities.
10. It is interesting to note that in the mid-twentieth century, the Kuna, the neighbours of the Emberá, formed dance societies (Holloman 1969: 480; Smith 1984: 191–94) and developed a variety of secular dancing (from traditional roots) which was made available to visiting foreigners, and later, tourists (Smith 1984: 257–58; Howe 2009: 181). Nowadays, these dances are considered as part of the Kuna tradition.
11. In Darien, I have met Emberá who own accordions, an instrument used to play both indigenous and non-indigenous music. Reina Torres de Araúz also observed the use of accordions by the Emberá during her fieldwork in the 1960s (Torres de Araúz 1966: 135).
12. Panama gained its independence from Colombia only in 1903.
13. I mentioned earlier that, during its initial stage, Emberá involvement with indigenous tourism was encouraged by the Panamanian state and facilitated by some infrastructural assistance provided by Panamanian NGOs. The Emberá have, however, been responsible for the content of their cultural presentations, and all cultural aspects of these presentations.

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